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ABSTRACT

A project developed a program for improving the attitudes of primary students toward reading and encouraging them to become strategic readers. The targeted population consisted of first-grade students in rural-suburban communities west of a large midwestern city. The problem of poor attitudes toward reading and lack of knowledge of reading strategies was documented through surveys, teacher journal entries, and skills checklists. Analysis of probable cause data revealed: (1) the lack of adequate materials; (2) limited home literacy experiences; (3) restricted teaching strategies; and (4) a failure to address the diversity of student needs. Professional literature and reviews of curricular content suggest causes related to an over-emphasis on the basal reading approach, the use of ability grouping, and student inability to use multiple strategies to become independent readers. Solution strategies combined with an analysis of the problem setting resulted in three major categories of intervention. A literature-based classroom and a reading workshop program were implemented and mini-lessons designed for the development of word attack skills were presented in whole group and small group sessions. Results from post-intervention data indicated a decrease in the percentage of students who found reading difficult and an increase in the understanding of reading strategies. (Contains 4 figures of data and 36 references; 8 sample forms are appended.) (Author/CR)

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DEVELOPING POSITIVE ATTITUDES AND STRATEGIC READING SKILLS IN PRIMARY STUDENTS

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A MASTER'S THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

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Title: Developing Positive Attitudes and Strategic Reading Skills in Primary Students

This report described a program for improving the attitudes of primary children toward reading, and encouraged them to become strategic readers. The targeted population consisted of first grade students in rural-suburban communities west of a large Midwestern city. The problem of poor attitudes toward reading and lack of knowledge of reading strategies was documented through surveys, teacher journal entries, and skills checklists.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed: the lack of adequate materials, limited home literacy experiences, restricted teaching strategies, and a failure to address the diversity of student needs. The professional literature, as well as reviews of curricular content, suggest causes related to an over-emphasis on the basal reading approach, the use of ability grouping, and student inability to use multiple strategies to become independent readers.

Solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in three major categories of intervention. A literature-based classroom, and a Reading Workshop program were implemented. Mini-lessons designed for the development of word attack skills were presented in whole group and small group sessions.

Post intervention data indicated a decrease in the percentage of students who found reading difficult and an increase in the understanding of reading strategies.

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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of Problem

The students of the targeted first grade classes demonstrate a negative attitude toward reading and are not strategic readers. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes teacher observations, parent surveys, student attitude surveys, reading conference log, and a reading strategy checklist.

Immediate Problem Context

The targeted school is part of a consolidated unit school district. The elementary school, which consists of pre-kindergarten through sixth grades, has a population of 1,251 students. The elementary student population is comprised of the following racial/ethnic backgrounds: 96.1 percent Caucasian, 0.2 percent Native-American, 1.8 percent Mexican-American, 0.9 percent Black, and 0.9 percent Asian. There are 3.8 percent low income students at the school. No students in the school are eligible for bilingual education. The attendance rate is the highest in the county at 95.82 percent. The student mobility rate is ten percent (School Report Card, 1994).

The teaching staff of the school consists of 76 teachers, all of whom are Caucasian. Within this number, 54 are certified classroom teachers and 22 make up the support services staff. Ninety percent of the teachers are females and ten percent are males. The average teaching experience is 14 years. Teachers with bachelor's degrees make up 48.6 percent of the staff and 51.4 percent have earned their master's degrees and above.

Built in 1976 as a middle school, the target site contains a large media center, which is centrally located for easy classroom access, a gymnasium and gym deck, an art studio and a computer lab. There are seven sections for every grade level, first through sixth grades, eight sections of kindergarten, and two sections of pre-kindergarten. The school is at 109 percent capacity and four mobile units are being used. The average class size is 24.9 students. Classroom teachers work individually and in teams to teach Language Arts, Math, Science, Health and Safety, and Social Studies. Specialist teachers provide instruction in Art, Instrumental Music, Physical Education, Vocal Music, Media Skills, Computer Literacy and Applications, and challenging the Gifted. The support staff includes the following: three reading specialists, six cross--categorical teachers, two speech therapists, one social worker, one psychologist, and one counselor. There are 12 inclusion students attending the elementary school. The administrative staff of the elementary school consists of one principal and one assistant principal. There is no curriculum director to coordinate all the areas of learning (Board of Education Offices, 1994).

In order to understand the problem stated earlier, certain issues need to be clarified. The reading program in the targeted school has traditionally used the basal reader approach. Based on their own school experiences, many parents and educators in the community support the traditional approach to teaching reading. Until recently, teachers in the targeted school have not had the freedom to make their own decisions regarding the teaching of reading. A new administrative staff is in place, which has caused a change in the instructional philosophy. The principal makes the decisions regarding instruction. Teachers are being encouraged to try new approaches to reading. Freedom to teach the skills in the context of literature and trade books is becoming more evident.

The decrease in state funding has put more of a burden on taxpayers. In 1988, voters approved a 66 cent per hundred dollar of valuation increase in the education fund rate to maintain the standard of education. In the spring of 1993, voters approved an increase in the Operations and Maintenance Fund, as well as a Health/Life Safety Bond. In November of 1994, voters defeated a 60 cent per hundred dollar of valuation in the education fund rate. Citizens will again be asked to support the 60 cent referendum (D.D. Dunton, personal communication, March 1995). The failure of this referendum will have an effect on the school's programing. Lack of funding will continue to create a deficiency in the purchase of reading materials that would be available to teachers who wish to try a different approach to the teaching of reading.

The Surrounding Community

The school is located approximately 60 miles from a large midwestern metropolitan area. This is primarily an agricultural area, however, less than seven percent of the student population comes from an agrarian background. The district serves four communities in a 140 square mile attendance area. The total enrollment of the district is 2,191 students. Two main buildings are located on one site. One houses pre-kindergarten through sixth grade and the other houses middle and senior high school students. A bus garage, bus parking area and maintenance building sit between the two buildings. The campus is spread over 40 acres, filled with a football field, tennis courts, softball and baseball fields, and soccer fields. There is a wild prairie area, a huge parent-constructed playground, a seven-station nature trail, many trees and a pond.

No major industries are located in the district's communities. This would be considered a middle class community with housing costs ranging from $80,000 to $500,000. The cost of the average home is approximately $120,000. The majority of the population lives in single family homes. The median income of the families in the district is between $40,000 and $45,000. The occupations of the people in the surrounding communities consist of farmers, blue collar workers, laborers, and professionals. These people work in their own communities or commute to the metropolitan area. The educational level of the population varies from community to community, ranging from high school diplomas only, to college graduates and post-graduates. There are no notable

religious or ethnic considerations that would have an impact on the problem as stated in this report (D.D. Dunton, personal communication, March 1995).

The administrative structure of the district is comprised of a Superintendent, an Assistant Superintendent for Business, three principals, and two assistant principals. The district is guided by a seven member elected Board of Education, which represents the broad range of interests found in a rural/suburban community. Members include professionals, business leaders, and skilled tradespersons.

The teaching staff of the district consists of 113 teachers. The pupil teacher ratio is 21:1 and the pupil administrator ratio is 288:1. Operating expenditure per pupil for the district is $4,500 (School Report Card, 1994).

The school is the center of activities for the many communities being served. There is a great amount of community support. Evidence for this is the fact that 98.2 percent of the parents/guardians in the district made at least one contact with the students' teachers in the 1993-1994 school year. There is a citizen group, the Legislative Network of Mid-Valley Schools, which lobbies for change (School Report Card, 1994).

The biggest problems facing the district are funding and adequate building facilities. Population growth is an issue to be dealt with. The population of the district has increased at three percent a year over the last ten years. Today's present rate of growth will increase the school districts enrollment from 2,191 to 3,500 in five years. People are moving into these communities because of the

rate of inflation, low interest rates, and the desire to live in a rural setting away from high crime areas.

Regional and National Context of Problem

The problem of a negative attitude toward reading is nationwide. Teachers are aware that motivation is one of the keys to learning to read. During the years that it will take most children to learn to read, their attention must be sustained. "Increasing the proportion of children who read widely and with evident satisfaction ought to be as much a goal of reading instruction as increasing the number who are competent readers" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 15). Many articles have been written concerning the need for classroom environments and teaching practices that may direct children to the joys of reading. In the 1950's and 1960's the basal reader was a source of stories in many classrooms. Test scores were remarkably stable when looked at over the long term. Most children learned how to decode simple print but did not become motivated, life-long readers (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress issued a report which indicated that NAEP scores are rising, however fewer students are reading voluntarily for pleasure or for information (Cramer, 1993). The problem of developing positive attitudes toward reading is evident at all levels. A widespread survey of all research studies on reading attitude was published in 30 American scholarly journals between 1900 and 1977. A conclusion of these studies was that "attitudes and achievement are closely related and that good

comprehension is related to positive attitudes toward reading" (Cramer, 1993, p. 128). Researchers have examined the differences between good and poor readers. It was determined that poor readers did not feel they were in control of their own learning. As a consequence, they adopted a negative attitude toward reading in order to lessen the effects of failure (Winograd & Gaskins, 1992).

Troubled readers often do not trust their own reading strategies. They depend on teachers to tell them what to do as they read. "They are reluctant to take the necessary risks, with the result that their reading and writing looks far less competent than it actually is. They believe that everyone knows that they are literary failures, and they act the part" (Goodman, 1986, p.55). Poor readers frequently do not see the point of reading. Skilled reading needs to be strategic. A study involving second and sixth graders, regarding their strategies for coping with failures to understand the text, showed that poor readers were unable to say what they would do. Better readers would ask for help or go to a dictionary. This study was confirmed by actually observing the children in the classroom (Anderson et al., 1985).

> According to Anderson (1985), children do not like to fail. Predictably, poor readers have unfavorable attitudes toward reading. What is not so predictable is whether lack of proficiency in reading stems from unfavorable attitudes or whether it is the other way around. Probably the truth can lie in either direction. (p. 15)

Based on the research cited in the above text, the problem of a student's negative attitude toward reading has received nationwide attention. Therefore, a personal study of the problem needs to be undertaken.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Evidence

In order to document the problem of a negative attitude towards reading and a lack of strategic reading skills, the results of parent and student reading attitude surveys and a reading checklist were noted. A letter was sent to the parents informing them of the surveys they and their child would be asked to complete (Appendix A). The surveys were given in September, 1995, and January, 1996. Data was gathered from two targeted classes. A total of 50 first grade students completed a reading attitude survey developed by the researchers (Appendix B) which is shown in Figure 1.

Question	Yes	A Little	No
Do you like to read?	32	12	6
Do you like when people read stories to you at home?	42	6	2
Do you like to listen to stories the teacher reads?	37	11	2
Is reading hard for you?	21	17	12
Do you like to read out loud in class?	16	11	23
Do you like to take books home to your parents?	41	8	1
Do you like doing reading workbook pages and worksheets?	20	16	14
Do you like to read during your free time at school?	33	10	7

Figure 1.
Reading Attitude Survey Results
September 1995

Of the 50 surveys given to the students in September, 64 percent enjoy reading, however 42 percent find reading is difficult. Therefore, it is our intent to teach the students reading strategies to make reading easier for them. Even though a high percentage of students like to read, a further analysis of the survey indicates that 46 percent do not like reading out loud in class. As students become more skilled in reading, they might gain confidence and therefore have a more positive attitude toward reading.

The results of the Observational Guide for Parents (Appendix C) are documented in Figure 2. In Figure 2, the findings show a positive attitude toward reading. However, 65 percent of parents noted that their child often lacked the skills necessary to figure out new words. The reading checklist was administered individually by the teacher to assess the student's knowledge of reading strategies at the end of the first quarter, November, 1995, and at the end of the second quarter, January, 1996 (Appendix D).

Anecdoctal records, based on teacher observations of the student's knowledge of reading strategies, were noted as a pre-intervention assessment. Whole group mini-lessons on reading strategies were conducted and students kept a record of individual books they read, using the Reading Log (Appendix E).

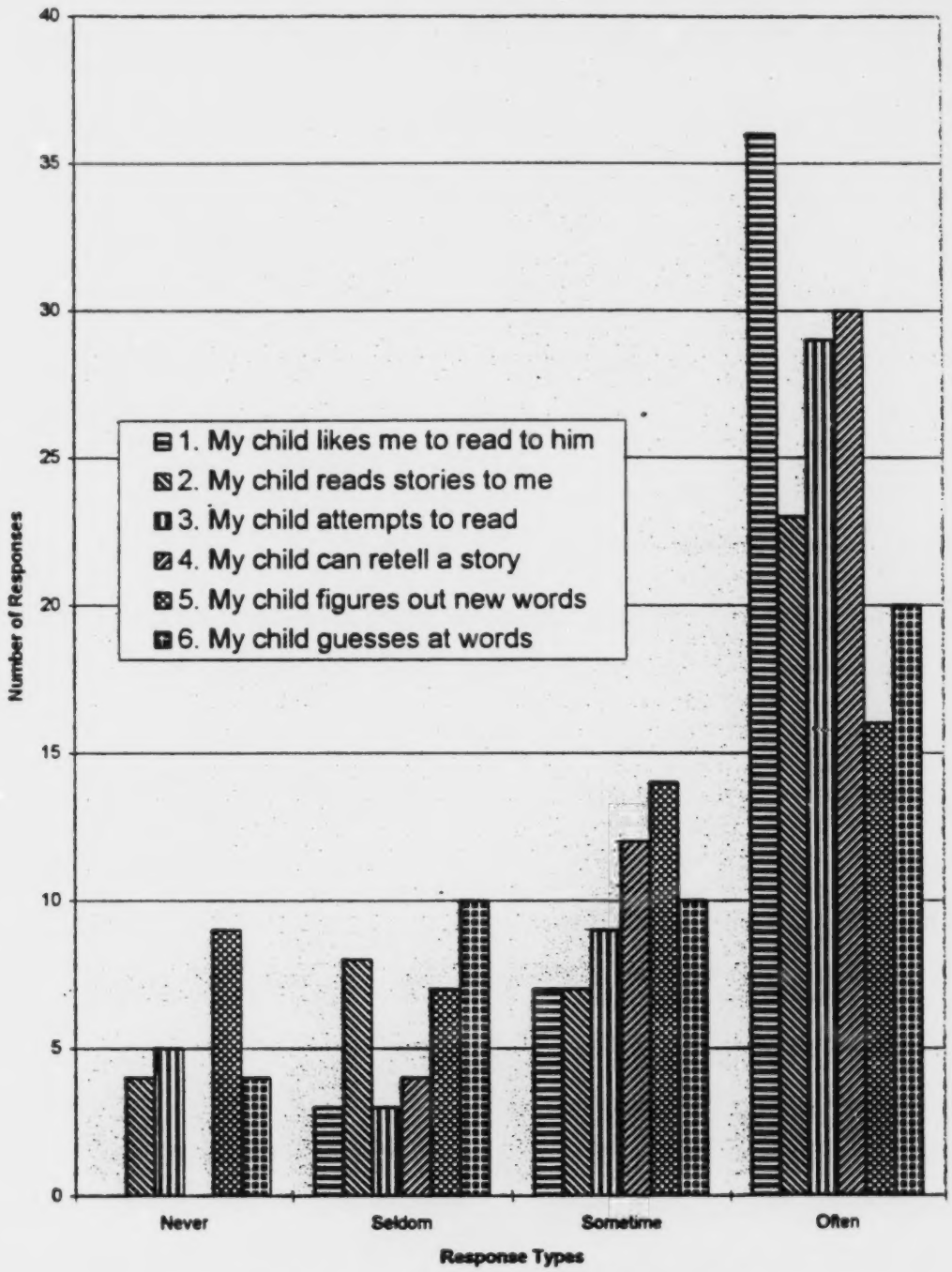


Figure 2 My Child As A Reader Survey Results
September 1995

Probable Causes

Site-based

In analyzing the student's attitude towards reading and their progress in becoming strategic readers, one might begin by focusing on the site. In the targeted school the reading program has traditionally used the basal reader approach. Even though the principal has encouraged teachers to try new approaches to reading, the services of a curriculum director have not been available to provide direction in the development of a basal-free, literature based classroom. As a result, staff development in setting up a literature based classroom has been minimal.

Another area of concern is the district's failure to pass several education fund referenda. As a result of these failures, a deficiency in the ability to purchase reading materials appropriate for a literature based classroom is evident. There are seven first grade classes in the targeted school. Due to this high number of students, a sufficient quantity of multiple copies of literature is not available to all the teachers. The necessity to share literature hinders the teacher's ability to keep these books in their classroom. A lack of communication between grade levels and the large number of staff involved, results in a lack of continuity in the teaching of reading.

Literature-Based

The literature suggests various causes for a negative attitude toward reading and for students not becoming strategic readers. According to Routman

(1991) students' attitudes towards reading remain positive when immersed in a literature based classroom. Students are aware of the importance of choice in their reading material and the need for time set aside for reading. Schooley (1994) citing a study by Gunning reports that students who are given some choices in the books they read have a more favorable attitude toward reading. Teachers using a literature based reading program can involve more students in interest-centered reading. Hopefully attitudes and the ability to become strategic readers will improve.

One reason children tend to be aliterate (can read, but choose not to) is the dull content of basal readers (Cramer, 1993). Reasons for their popularity are they are attractive, colorful, and easy to manage. However, basal reading programs do not develop real-world skills, do not encourage readers to search for meaning in language, do not encourage creative or divergent thinking, and do not promote the integration of the other language arts: listening, speaking, and writing. Children who are hurried through basal readers are less likely to have a positive attitude toward reading (Bingham & Allen, 1986).

Use of basal readers does not empower teachers to make decisions regarding literacy instruction. A study done by Lehman, Freeman, and Allen (1994) reveals that the students of 91 percent of the teachers who implemented a literature based reading program have very positive or moderately positive attitudes toward reading.

Studies have shown that poor attitudes toward reading are created by the

skill and strategy approach that is being used by most basal readers. Many research studies showed that students in typical primary grade classrooms were only reading independently seven to eight minutes per day. Students spend up to 77 per cent of reading instructional time completing worksheets and workbook pages. Reading instruction has been focused too heavily on skills. The basal reader has contributed to this over-emphasis on skills with its practice skills sheets (Anderson et al., 1985). Routman agrees that skills are important, but their usage needs to be strategic. Children's literature, on the other hand, incorporates open-ended possibilities, meaningful text, and rich text. It creates moving beyond skills to developing reading strategies in a natural fashion. It establishes reading as a process of generating meaning from print (Routman, 1988).

In 1991, the National Reading Research Center (NRRC) conducted a poll in the United States of International Reading Association members to determine priorities for reading research. Results revealed that the top priority for research should be on how to enhance children's interest and motivation for reading. This study suggests that reading instruction needs to develop readers who are (a) motivated to read independently for pleasure and information, (b) able to apply multiple skills strategically to read and comprehend independently, (c) able to transfer previous and new knowledge to other contexts, and (d) able to approach literacy learning through social cooperative experiences. In order to meet these criteria a literature based reading program was implemented (Morrow & Sharkey, 1993).

Ability grouping is used in classrooms all over the country and has been popular in American schools since the 1920s (Davis & Cantalupo, 1991). This type of classroom organization arose when teachers began to accelerate the progress of the brighter students while trying to meet the needs of the students who did not learn as quickly. This form of grouping would allow each student to receive instruction that is tied more closely to their particular needs; therefore resulting in an overall increase in achievement. However, recent research indicates that ability grouping does not increase student achievement and is detrimental to a student's self-concept (Morgan cited in Berghoff & Egawa, 1991).

The controversy surrounding ability grouping has been widely researched. Historically, most people can recall stories about Dick and Jane while at the same time remembering being assigned to a particular reading group. We may remember the embarrassment of being placed in a "low" reading group or the thrill of being in the "high" reading group. One of the important contributions of recent educational research has been the rejection of ability grouping and the acceptance of heterogeneous grouping. "One of the most shameful and unnecessary practices in American schools has been the routine division of children into different classrooms or instructional groups on the basis of ability" (Zemelman et al.,1993, p.191). Researchers like Oakes (1985) and Wheelock (1992) cited in (Zemelman et al., 1993) have collected conclusive evidence that ability grouping is academically harmful to students labeled low and middle, and

researchers are still debating whether tracking (ability grouping) is beneficial for high level students.

The social effects of ability grouping indicate that tracking is destructive for everyone and undermines the American values of democracy, diversity, and pluralism (Zemelman et al., 1993). Our job is to teach and develop whole students, therefore we must begin to structure our classes more heterogeneously and treat all of our students intelligently and with respect (Routman, 1991). When students are grouped heterogeneously, opportunities are provided which allows all students to work together. This creates a classroom community of learners and promotes all students with positive attitudes towards reading (Routman, 1991).

In the Report of the Commission on Reading (Anderson, et al., 1985) the following disadvantages of homogeneous grouping were cited:

1. Children are aware of their reading group placement regardless of the creative names given to the groups.

2. Teachers tend to have lower expectations for low group readers.

3. Children in low groups do much more oral reading than silent reading.

4. Teachers ask fewer higher level thinking questions of low group students.

5. Students in low groups are often low in social maturity, therefore are more easily distracted.

6. Once teachers plug students into a low group it is difficult for the

student to move to another group during the year as well as following years. "Once a buzzard, always a buzzard".

Research evidence supports serious problems with homogeneous grouping. Therefore, educators should explore other options for reading instruction (Anderson et al., 1985,).

Knowledgeable, conscientious professionals need to carefully re-evaluate the homogeneous grouping practices that are prevalent in the United States. Ability grouping, as it pertains to reading in the elementary level, needs to be changed. Slavin (1989) who has done a thorough analysis on the data available on ability grouping, is cited in Routman as saying "every means of grouping students by ability or performance levels has drawbacks that may be serious enough to offset any advantages" (1991, p. 77). A study conducted by Robertson (1993) involving first grade remedial readers found that children in a non-ability grouped classroom do seem to have more positive attitudes toward reading. It was found that ability grouping for instruction had either no effect on a student's self-image and attitude, or it had a negative effect. Overall, research concludes that children in a non-ability grouped program had more positive attitudes toward reading as compared with the basal (ability grouped) program.

Teacher behaviors determine whether or not students become strategic readers. As teachers begin to focus on strategies, the climate of their classroom begins to change from teacher dominated to student centered. Teachers in a literature based classroom often emphasize trying and risk taking. They

encourage children's attempts to read through constant praise, and do not interrupt reading to correct miscues. The teacher allows a child the chance to self correct and develop strategies. In an ability grouped classroom the teacher emphasizes correctness and accuracy. The teacher often interrupts a reader to correct a miscue, or allows another child to interrupt and correct the miscue. The teacher gives praise only if the child's reading conforms to conventional standards of correctness (Routman, 1991).

In summary, it is evident that the following causes are the major reasons of a student's negative attitude toward reading and a lack of strategic reading skills: (a) the skill and strategy approach used by most basal readers, (b) homogeneous grouping, also referred to as ability grouping, in the classroom, (3) teacher behaviors which do not focus on risk taking to improve the student's reading strategies.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

After reviewing the literature concerning a negative attitude towards reading and a lack of strategic reading skills, we noted that the solutions could be grouped into four main categories. The solution strategies are: (a) literature based classroom, (b) heterogeneous grouping, (3) cooperative groups, (4) independent reading.

Students' attitudes toward reading remain positive when immersed in a literature based classroom (Routman, 1991). It is important to students to have a choice in the selection of their reading material and to have time set aside for reading. Studies have shown that poor attitudes toward reading are created by the skill and strategy approach being used by most basal readers.

Literature based classroom

Immersing children in literature through creating a literacy environment in the classroom is a challenge that teachers face as they focus towards whole language. Children who are immersed in a print-rich environment are aware of print as they see it used functionally every day. Immersion in literacy experiences

and activities will improve the attitudes that children have about reading (Nagan, 1994).

Lehman, Freeman, and Allen (1994) reported that despite the growing interest nationwide for using children's literature as the core of the reading program, there has been little documented research regarding literature based reading programs. Research, regarding ways in which literature is taught in the classroom, is a continuing process and fills a much needed gap in our understandings about the teaching and learning of literature. The biggest challenge in developing a literature based classroom is not to search the "right" way to teach a book, but to consider the purposes for instruction (McGee, 1992). Research describes some of the innovative ways teachers organize children for reading instruction, including the use of core books (books that teachers read aloud or children read and respond to), literature units, self-selected books, and cooperative learning groups.

Some researchers argue that literature should not be used directly to teach reading skills. Instead, teachers should share literature in ways that preserve the aesthetic qualities of stories and poems. According to a study conducted by McGee (1992), teachers face a challenge in implementing a literature based reading program because they have limited knowledge about literature, organizational strategies, and ways to document student learning.

Literature can be used to teach skills strategically. One of the methods is through the use of picture books because of their match between illustration and

text. Another approach is the use of predictable books. These books are meaningful and readable for the emergent reader, and make it possible for the beginning reader to meet immediate success (Routman, 1988). The qualities of rhyme, repetition, natural flow of language and a meaningful story make these books easily readable. Poetry is important in a literature based reading program because of its rich language and appealing rhythm. There is a wealth of teaching material to be found in poems. Numerous reading strategies, such as vowel sounds, word families, and beginning and ending sounds, can be taught through poetry.

Heterogeneous grouping

Whole-classroom participation is one part of the new dynamic in education. According to (Zemelman et al., 1993) best practice classrooms cannot succeed unless students can work together effectively in small groups without constant teacher supervision. Research shows that students show significant achievement gains when they are organized into collaborative groups.

Paired reading is one of the ways to promote heterogeneous grouping. In this activity two students may take turns reading aloud to each other, or pairs may read independently and join to discuss the reading. In an effort to create a "talking place" in the classroom, Pierce (1995) observed that partner reading allows children to control the pace of the reading experience and the discussion without having to deal with a group. This teacher found that productive partner reading was so easy compared to the group experience that it was used often

and for a variety of purposes. By observing students during these talking times, information was gathered about the strategies readers were using to make sense of the text.

Cross-Age Tutoring

Another way to immerse young children in literature is to set up a reading buddy system with a class of older children. Trelease (1989) reports on a peer learning activity in the Pittston, Pennsylvania area schools. Fifth grade students read twice a week to first and second grade students during preschool breakfast time. It was noted that there was a significant improvement in reading attitudes as a result of the program. According to the parents, first grade students could be heard at home modeling their reading buddy. The impact on the self-image of the fifth graders, especially the remedial readers, was one of the program's best credentials.

Jacoby and Rosenberg (1993) reported on a first grade/fourth grade buddy program. A nurturing relationship seemed to develop between the children. Having a fourth grade buddy appeared to be an important part of each child's sense of self. The fourth graders were able to give direction to the ideas of the less skilled first graders so there was reciprocity of learning. Working in pairs can involve a peer tutoring paradigm. Cramer (1993) noted that a student who has mastered another skill can help another student who may be having difficulty.

Read aloud

According to Routman (1991), the most influential factor in a young child's success in learning to read, is reading aloud by the teacher. Teachers often feel uncomfortable about spending time daily reading aloud. It is important to realize that reading aloud improves listening skills, builds vocabulary, helps reading comprehension, and has a positive impact on students attitudes toward reading.

Reading aloud has been validated by educational research in recent years. This strategy can no longer be considered a peripheral activity (Avery, 1993). "There is no substitute for a teacher who reads children good stories. It whets the appetite of children for reading, and provides a model of skillful oral reading" (Anderson, et al., 1985, p. 51).

Independent reading

Sustained silent reading (SSR) is also an integral part of a reading program. Hunt, who formally labeled the concept of SSR, sees the goal of reading instruction as developing children who can read silently without interruption for periods of half an hour or more. This time frame is a progressive development beginning in kindergarten. A benefit of SSR, emphasized by McCracken and McCracken (1987), is that it provides an extensive supply of language models. When children are exposed to a multitude of good books they will imitate the language of these books in speaking and writing. The principle is simple, reading is, among other things, a skill, and like all skills, the more you use it the better you become at it. Studies report that younger and older

readers show significant improvement in attitude and skills (Trelease, 1982). According to McCracken and McCracken (1979), SSR can be viewed in two ways. First, it is a time to practice what has been taught. Secondly, SSR is a teaching time. Trelease (1982) refers to SSR as "Reading Aloud's Natural Partner."

The Reading Workshop concept was introduced as an alternative approach to providing reading instruction. According to Reutzel and Cooter (1991), there are five main components of the reading workshop. They are (a) sharing time, (b) the mini-lesson, (c) state-of-the class, (d) self-selected reading and response, and (e) sharing time. The initial sharing time is when the teacher can share new literature. Mini-lessons are short, teacher led whole group instructional sessions for demonstrating reading strategies to prepare students to read new books independently. Mini-lessons offer a way out of the use of basal programs and the practice of grouping children by ability for reading instruction. This pre-reading activity helps teachers establish a climate for the development of positive attitudes, interest, and motivation. The purpose of the state-of-the class component is to inform the teacher and students of their responsibilities and progress during the workshop.

The major portion of the reading workshop is self-selected reading and response. Sustained silent reading, literature response, and individual reading conferences are involved in this segment. A closing sharing time is recommended when teachers and students share activities, books, projects, and

so forth with the group. Teachers may make comments regarding individual reading conferences or share part of a book someone was reading during SSR.

Reading workshop allows for flexibility in its organization. Avery (1993), concluded that no two children learn to read within the same time frame and with the same strategies. Also, readers may not enjoy the same material or read at the same speed. The development of reading requires a "waiting, responsive teaching style." Reutzel and Cooter (1991), noted that teachers who use the Reading Workshop are experiencing success, increased student involvement, and observing that the students are taking control of their own reading instruction. According to Avery (1993), reading workshop allowed for an individualized pace and provided opportunity for a one-to-one response time with the teacher.

One-on-one conferencing with the teacher seems to increase the self--esteem of a child. An individualized program such as Reading Workshop can reduce the chances that the student will have a negative attitude toward reading. A study conducted by McDonald, Harris, and Mann in 1966 (cited in Robertson, 1993) found that better attitudes toward reading were a result of conferencing. Meeting in conferences one-on-one seems to increase the child's self-esteem.

Project Outcomes and Solution Components

As a result of a literature based reading program, during the period of September 1995 to January 1996, the first grade students from the targeted classes will decrease their negative attitude towards reading, as measured by anecdotal records and surveys.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. A variety of literature that will give them choices in reading and reading incentive programs such as 600 Minute Reading Club, and Read to the Principal.

2. Develop a Reading Workshop that will provide choices in reading.

As a result of instruction in strategic reading processes during the period of September 1995 to January 1996, first grade students from the targeted classes will increase their reading comprehension and word attack skills as measured by checklists and assessments.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Present lessons in whole group or small group settings to practice and reinforce word attack skills.

2. Develop a poetry folder which includes poems from units or themes studied throughout the year.

Action Plan for the Intervention

I. Literature Based Classroom
   A. Purpose
      1. Improve attitude and interest in reading
      2. Exposure to various genres
      3. To develop life-long readers

   B. Timing
      1. September through January
      2. Three hours each day

   C. Activities
      1. Various literature books (poetry, big books, predictable books, wordless books, books based on themes)
      2. Reading incentives (600 Minute reading club, Read to the principal)

3. Cooperative groups, Interest groups, Peer tutoring, Reading buddies with a sixth grade class two times a month
4. Trade Books- books that are found in libraries or sold through book clubs, and retail outlets- fiction, poetry, plays, biographies, and non-fiction)
5. Author study (monthly study of books written by a particular author)

II. Lessons on word attack skills
   A. Purpose
      1. to become a reading risk-taker
      2. developing strategic readers
      3. encourage reading fluency

   B. Timing
      1. September through January
      2. Three times a week
      3. 15 to 20 minutes per session

   C. Activities
      1. Phonics (beginning, ending sounds, short and long vowels, consonant clusters)
      2. Poetry folders (on-going collection of teacher collected poems to practice word attack skills
      3. Language Experience Stories (stories written by the class based on a classroom experience)
      4. Word families (words using same spelling pattern)
      5. Word tracking (finger pointing to show one to one correspondence)
      6. Book re-write (students will write their own book following a pattern of a previously read book)
      7. Sight words (words that are frequently found in first grade reading material)

III. Reading Workshop
   A. Purpose
      1. To practice independent reading
      2. To help view themselves as readers
      3. To help students to see reading as easy rather than difficult

   B. Timing
      1. September through January
      2. Begin with ten minutes a day and continue to increase the time as the year goes on to 30 minutes a day.

C. Activities
   1. Students will select their own book
   2. Students will keep a reading log (list of books they have read)
   3. Mini-lessons on procedures to begin reading, (procedures for selecting books, how to take care of a book, using soft voices, the importance of thoughtful reading rather than moving through several titles)
   4. Teacher-student conference regarding what the student has read

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, reading logs and reading reflections will be developed to monitor reading attitudes. These assessments will be used in conjunction with Reader's Workshop which will be implemented in September. Teacher-student conferences will enable the teacher to check for understanding and allow the students to share their feelings about the book. Parent and student surveys will be given in September and January to determine the students' attitudes about reading. The oral reading assessment will be given in November and January to assess the reading strategies the student uses. These strategies include: (a) what students do when they become stuck on a word, (b) how they self-correct when a mistake has been made, (c) and comprehension strategies.

Chapter Four

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve the attitudes of primary children towards reading and encourage them to be strategic readers. The implementation of a literature-based classroom and a Reading Workshop program were selected to effect the desired changes. Mini-lessons were designed for the development of word attack skills and were presented in whole group and small group sessions.

A literature-based classroom was established to eliminate the skill and strategy approach used by most basal readers. This approach also eliminated homogeneous grouping, also referred to as ability grouping. Whole class reading activities were conducted by the teacher. Flexible grouping techniques were also established to address the diversity of student needs. Introducing students to a variety of genres was a major goal in improving students' attitudes towards reading. Some of the genres that were focused on this year were fairy tales, nursery rhymes, folk tales, poetry, fiction and non-fiction. These genres were presented in the form of big books, predictable books, wordless books, and

books based on themes. Predictable books are books with repetitious language that make children want to join in during oral reading. Some examples of predictable books that were used are Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? (Martin, 1967), Mary Wore Her Red Dress and Henry Wore His Green Sneakers (Peek, 1985), and The House That Jack Built (Cutts, 1979). Some favorite wordless books were The Snowman (Briggs, 1978) and Pancakes for Breakfast (De Paola, 1978). A nursery rhyme used to initiate a re-write of a predictable pattern was Oh, A-Hunting We Will Go (Langstaff, 1974).

Reading incentive programs that were part of the intervention were, Read to the Principal and the 600 Minute reading clubs. The goal for Read to the Principal, which was initiated in October, was to read 50 books outside of the classroom. This program required commitment from parents to listen to their child read and return signed reading logs (Appendix F). This program continued beyond the end of the intervention. Forty-five percent of the students in the two first grade classrooms accomplished the goal of reading to the principal. A highlight of this program was having their picture taken with the principal, receiving a certificate, and a ribbon. A ticket to Great America Amusement Park was the prize for reading 600 minutes during a six week period. This program also required commitment from parents to be listeners and to document the minutes their child read.

In September, a cross-age tutoring experience began with sixth graders. Twice a month the first graders chose a book to read to their buddy. A special

relationship developed between the first grader and the sixth grade buddy. As the first graders' reading ability increased their attitude towards reading to their buddy changed from apprehension to confidence.

An author study was introduced each month in the classroom. This was often related to the thematic unit of study. The purpose of the study was to expose the children to various authors with the hope that they would recognize and choose books by that author. For example, during a unit on color, Lois Ehlert was featured. Other favorite authors were Dr. Seuss, Eric Carle, and Frank Asch.

One of the activities correlated with an author study was a book re-write using the writing pattern of the author. An example is a re-write of Green Eggs and Ham (Seuss, 1960). Each student contributed a page which was put into a class book. This re-write activity was used as a whole class activity following the reading of big books and trade books of various genres.

The students kept a Poetry folder which included poems chosen by the teacher. As the poems were read, word attack skills were reviewed, word families and rhyming words were identified. Students would highlight these words with markers, and draw a picture to illustrate the poem. The poems included nursery rhymes, seasonal poems, and poems relating to thematic units.

Language Experience Stories were written as a class activity. The stories were based on an experience the class had participated in, such as, a field trip, an experiment conducted in the class, or any other classroom activity. The students were given a copy of the story for three or four days. Each day a

different activity was done to reinforce phonics skills. Some activities included finding particular initial and ending consonant sounds, vowel sounds, blends, and digraphs. The teacher also chose four or five sight words that the students should learn from the story. These might include words that first graders should know but cannot be sounded out phonetically. The story was read many times by the students so that they would be able to read it to their parents.

The Reading Workshop was developed to provide the students with choices in reading. Original plans called for starting this intervention in September. As that time approached, it was determined that the researchers needed more time to get to know the students and prepare them for making good choices. This intervention was delayed until November, the start of the second quarter. The teacher began the workshop with a shared reading time using a Big Book or a book on a particular genre. The beginning mini-lessons focused on how to choose a book that the student would be able to read. The five-finger rule was applied, which is, if the reader finds five words on a page that are too difficult, a different book should be chosen. Another mini-lesson that was used at the beginning of this intervention was to show what a reading workshop looks like. The teacher modeled how to choose a book and how to quietly find a place to read. The teacher also modeled how to record the date and title of the books on the Reading Log. A sample of the Reading Log can be found in Appendix E.

Other mini-lessons included strategies to use when the student gets stuck

on a word. Big books were used to show how to use beginning letter clues, picture clues, and how to think of a word that would make sense in the context of the sentence. The teacher also demonstrated how to go back to the beginning of the sentence and read it again. The students were assured that it was acceptable to make a good guess at a word.

During the students' reading time the teacher conducted individual reading conferences to observe if the students were using the strategies discussed earlier. Results of these conferences were recorded on the Oral Reading Assessment. An example of this assessment can be found in Appendix D. At the end of the student reading time, the class was called together for a sharing time. Students were encouraged to share their books with the class. With the teacher's guidance, the class also evaluated the Reading Workshop time and discussed how it could be better.

As the year progressed, mini-lessons centered around the characters, plot, and setting of the story. The students were asked to think about these ideas during their reading time and discuss them during sharing time. At the beginning of this intervention the students read ten to fifteen minutes a day and increased that time to at least thirty minutes as the year progressed.

The Reading Workshop is an example of a whole group lesson. Small group lessons were also conducted so the teacher could focus on activities that particular students needed to increase their word attack skills. During these lessons, phonics skills were reinforced, word tracking was observed, and

basic sight words were reviewed. These small group lessons were held three times a week for approximately fifteen minutes. The books used for these lessons were geared to their ability level. Students often worked with a partner as they read the book and shared their response to the book. Examples of student response activities can be found in Appendix G and Appendix H.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of improving students' attitudes towards reading, reading logs and reading reflections were maintained throughout the intervention. Student surveys were given at the beginning and end of the intervention. The data collected at the end of the intervention is presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

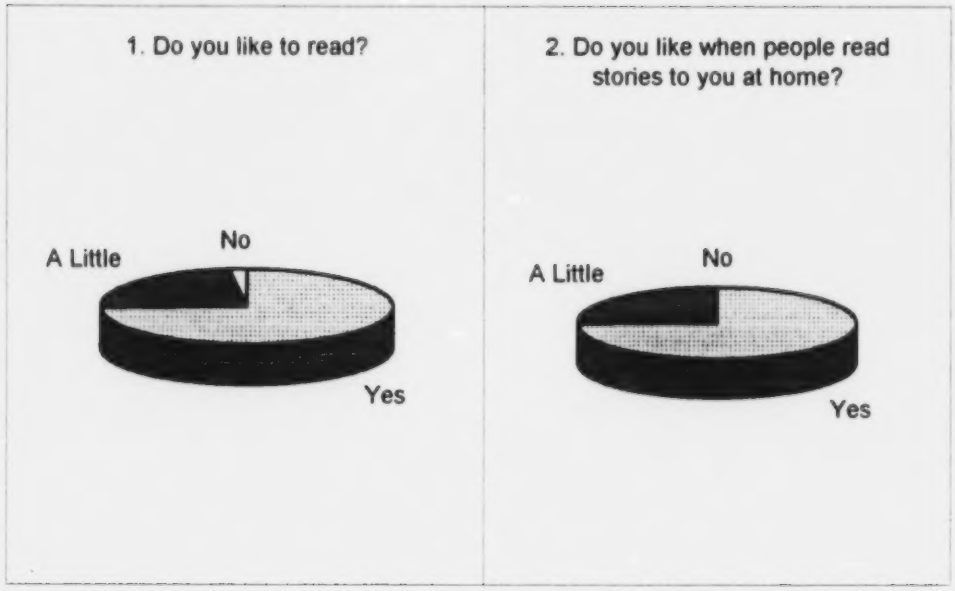
The results of the data collected at the end of the intervention suggest several things. First, the percentage of students who stated that they liked to read increased 12 percent, from 64% to 76%. See Figures 1 and 3. This was coupled with a substantial decrease in the percentage of students who found reading difficult, from 42% to 20%. The researchers attribute this decrease to the activities used to teach specific reading strategies rather than using the skill and strategy approach in the basal reader. A further analysis of the data reveals a significant increase in the percentage of the students reading out loud in class. At the beginning of the intervention 46 percent did not like to read out loud in class, however, this number dropped to 12 percent at the end of the intervention. This shows a positive four fold increase in the amount of students

who like to read out loud in class. The interventions appear to have had a positive effect on the students' attitudes toward reading and on the targeted reading strategies.

Question	Yes	A Little	No
Do you like to read?	38	12	1
Do you like when people read stories to you at home?	38	13	0
Do you like to listen to stories the teacher reads?	46	4	1
Is reading hard for you?	10	23	18
Do you like to read out loud in class?	33	12	6
Do you like to take books home to your parents?	40	5	6
Do you like reading workbook pages and worksheets?	20	19	12
Do you like to read during your free time at school?	33	11	7

Figure 3.
Reading Attitude Survey Results
January 1996

Parent surveys were given at the beginning and end of the intervention. The data collected at the end of the intervention is presented in Figure 4. The results of the parent survey reveal positive observations of their child's attitude toward reading. It also shows that their child is using the targeted strategies for becoming a better reader. There was a slight increase in the amount of children who read stories to their parents. It is also noted that parents observed their children making better attempts at reading and figuring out new words. Comments made by many parents reflect an improvement in their child's word attack skills, and an increase in their ability to read more challenging books. A consistent response from parents referred to a dramatic increase in their child's attitude toward reading. Many children no longer regard reading as a chore, and their frustration level has lessened.



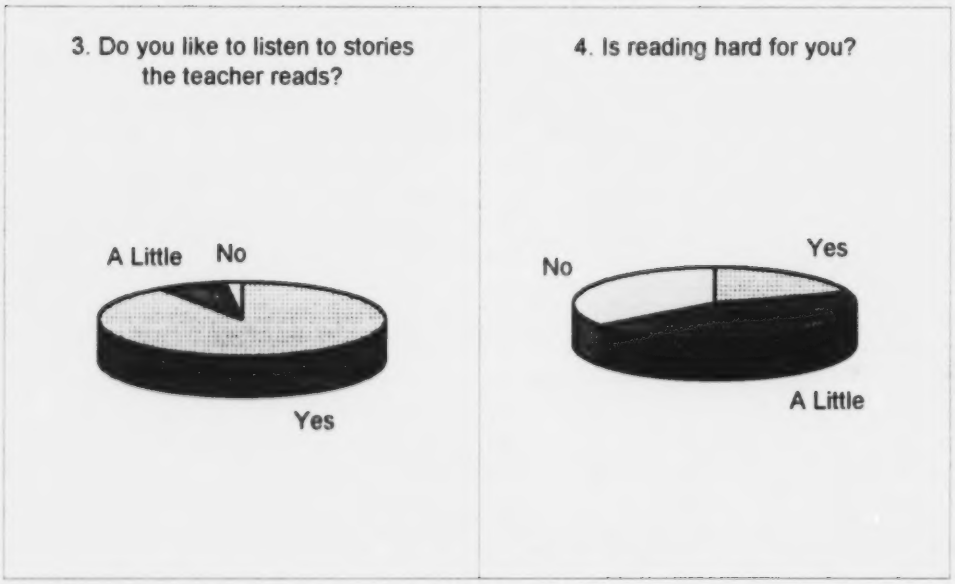
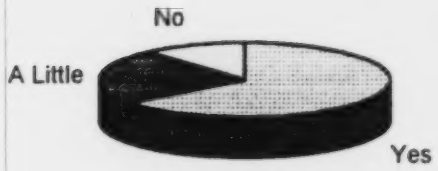
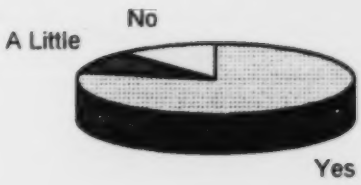


Figure 4.
Reading Attitude Survey Results
January 1996

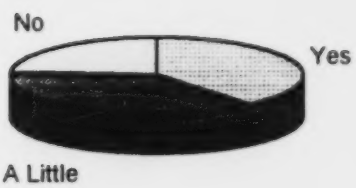
5. Do you like to read out loud in class?



6. Do you like to take books home to your parents?



7. Do you like doing reading workbook pages and worksheets?



8. Do you like to read during your free time at school?

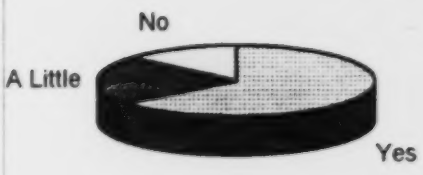


Figure 4 Continued.

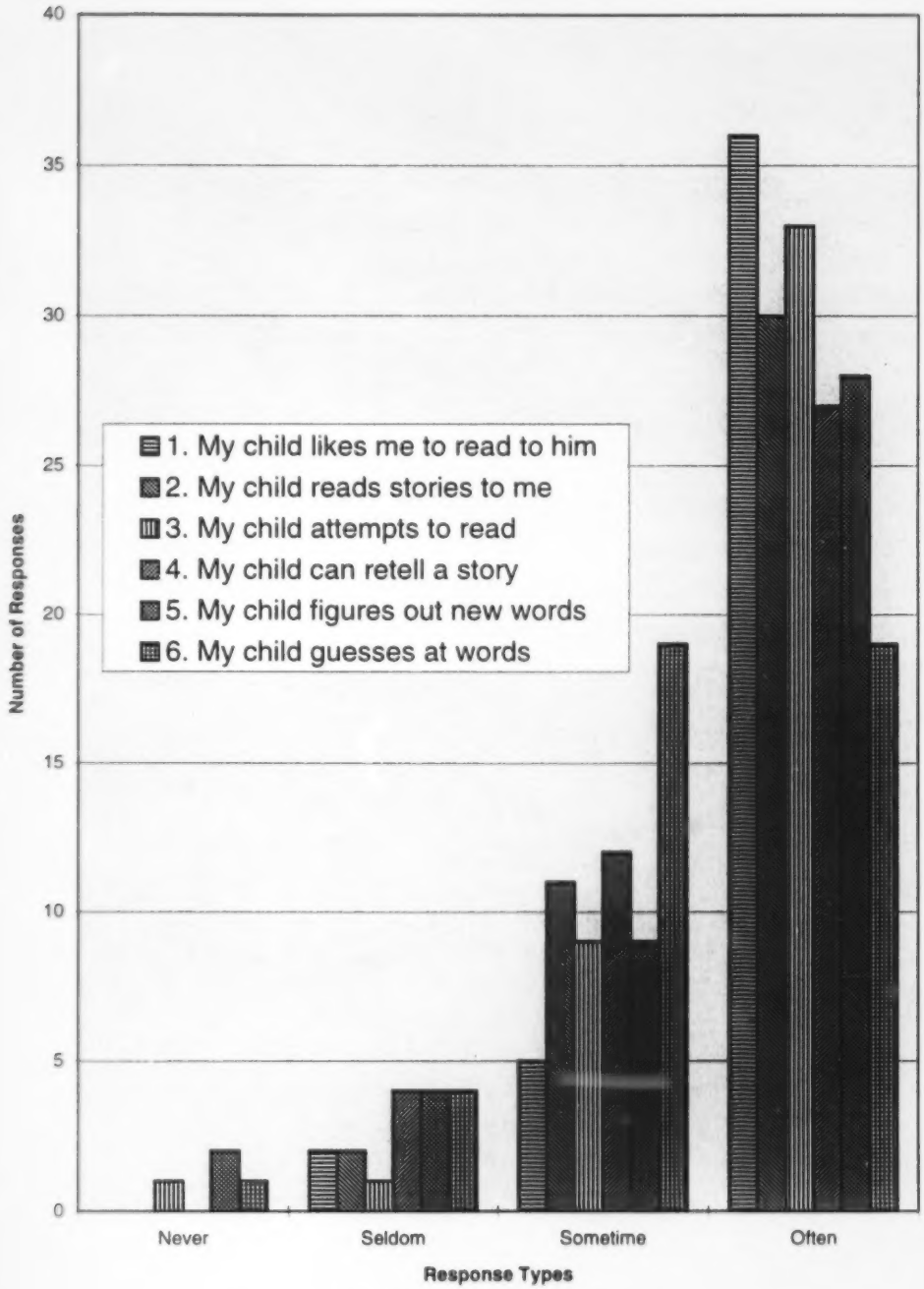


Figure 4 My Child As A Reader Survey Results
January 1996

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An oral reading assessment was given twice during the intervention to assess the reading strategies used by the students. In November and January the teacher listened to the students read a book that was unfamiliar to them, but was at their reading ability level. The purpose of this assessment was to determine if the students were using the strategies previously taught in the mini--lessons. In November the teacher had to prompt many students to use the strategies, however, in January it was noted that the students used the strategies independently. For example, a student in one of the classrooms that had difficulty with beginning consonant sounds, was now able to use that strategy to figure out a new word. This student could also verbalize to the teacher why that strategy was used. In the other classroom, a student that was more skilled in reading at the beginning of the year, but was afraid to try a new word, gained a great deal of confidence. The teacher observed this student taking risks and making attempts at new words. This resulted in a more fluent reader. The students became more proficient at self-correcting their reading miscues. The comprehension skills of the students improved as a result of becoming strategic readers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on students' attitudes toward reading and their use of reading strategies, the students showed a marked improvement in reading. The reading strategies learned during the mini--lessons appear to have transferred to their independent and oral reading. The

amount of teacher time devoted to working with numerous, small ability groups was reduced. Implementing whole class lessons provided the opportunity to teach in a heterogeneous setting. The researchers observed that the students learned from each other and felt they were an important part of their classroom community of learners. It was also noted that the two classrooms involved in this project were comprised of an equal number of boys and girls and were heterogeneously grouped. Therefore, there were no substantial differences between classes.

The establishment of a literature based classroom gave the teacher and students many choices in their reading. The teacher chose books that reinforced the purpose for instruction. For example, if the skill being studied was consonant blends, the teacher chose a book to read to the class that contained many words with that blend. The students were provided many choices for their independent reading and were exposed to a multitude of good books.

As a result of the decrease in the percentage of students who found reading difficult, students could maintain longer periods of independent reading. This reinforced the researcher's belief that the more the students read, the better they will become at it. As a result of more time on reading for the students, the teacher found more opportunities to meet one on one for student conferencing. Observing the other students engaged in reading, was a great reward for the teacher.

Opportunities for the teacher to read aloud to the class were greater. The data reveals that this strategy had a positive impact on the students' attitudes toward reading. It is believed that reading aloud helped build vocabulary and reading comprehension skills for the students. The teacher was able to observe this during the oral reading assessment.

At the start of this project the researchers were concerned that the needs of all the children in the class would not be met. After all, the basal reader was going to be used as a supplement rather than the primary source of reading material. Ability groups would be abandoned in favor of heterogeneous, whole group teaching. The students would be having more choice in the selection of their books. As a teacher, it can be somewhat difficult to give up that control.

In the second month of the intervention, the students were beginning to apply the reading strategies and make appropriate choices for their independent reading. The teacher was observing students absorbed in reading in every corner of the room. As the year progressed less skilled readers were feeling comfortable reading to more highly-skilled readers. It is the opinion of the researchers that the students are viewing reading as easy rather than difficult.

Establishing a literature based classroom is considered by the researchers to be an important element in improving students' attitudes toward reading. It was the desire of the researchers to preserve the aesthetic qualities of the stories. Listening to stories strictly for enjoyment was a goal of the teacher for the students. One of the challenging aspects of a literature based classroom was

to choose a book that met the purpose of the instruction. A book that was to be used to teach reading strategy skills should be one that has repetition, a natural flow of language as well as a meaningful story. This type of book makes it possible for emergent readers to meet immediate success. The researchers, therefore, highly recommend the establishment of a literature based classroom.

The Reading Workshop time was exciting to observe. Delaying the start of Reading Workshop resulted in more student success. The students were better prepared to make choices and use reading strategies which had been taught. Mini-lessons were a valuable tool in preparing students for independent reading during the Reading Workshop. This intervention allowed the students the flexibility to choose what they wanted to read and to read at their own pace. It allowed them to take control of their own reading instruction.

Through the research that was conducted and the results of what occurred in the classroom, the researchers concluded that immersing children in literacy experiences can improve attitudes toward reading. This experience was rewarding for the researchers as well as the students. The enthusiasm the teachers displayed carried over to all the students. This was evident in the response of students and parents. The researchers have made great strides in teaching students how to become strategic readers as well as having a positive attitude towards reading.

After implementing these interventions, the researchers are looking forward to continuing this approach to reading instruction next year. The

progress that was made by the first grade students exceeded the expectations of the teachers. The parent and student surveys were valuable tools in the assessment process. One activity the researchers would like to expand is cross--age tutoring with the sixth grade class. It would be beneficial to the students to read with their buddy once a week as compared to twice a month. The researchers observed the students' attitude toward reading increase, and the expectation would be that this would result in greater self-confidence.

The researchers plan on sharing these reading interventions with their colleagues. Due to the success of the project, other teachers are interested in pursuing some of the activities experienced in this approach to reading.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARENT LETTER

Dear Parents,

We are involved in an Action Research Project that is a requirement for our Masters Degree Program from St. Xavier University. You and your child will be asked to complete brief surveys at the beginning and end of the project. These surveys will be about your child's attitudes towards reading. The information gathered will be presented anonymously and will not affect your child's grade or academic evaluation in any way.

Thank you for your help and cooperation. If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to call us.

Yours truly,

Mrs. Jeanette Foss
Mrs. Candice Soper

Please complete the form below and return it to me

I have read the note regarding the use of surveys for teacher research.

Parent Signature

_____

APPENDIX B

READING ATTITUDE SURVEY

Name_____ Date_____

Reading Attitude Survey

Color the face that shows how you feel about reading.

1. Do you like to read?

2. Do you like when people read stories to you at home?

3. Do you like to listen to stories the teacher reads?

4. Is reading hard for you?

5. Do you like to read out loud in class?

6. Do you like to take books home to your parents?

7. Do you like doing reading workbook pages and worksheets?

8. Do you like to read during your free time at school?

APPENDIX C

OBSERVATIONAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Name _____ Date _____

Teacher _____ Grade _____

My Child as a Reader

(An Observational Guide for Parents)

With a vertical slash on the line indicate where you see your child's interest and participation in the reading process. Make comments or give examples of behaviors observed.

Never Seldom Sometimes Often

(shows little interest) (shows enthusiasm and attention)

1. My child likes me to read to him or her. (e.g., brings books from school library to share; likes regular bedtime stories)	
2. My child reads stories to me.(e.g., shares stories he or she has read at school; reads or attempts to read his or her own books and library books)	
3. My child attempts to read in everyday situations. (e.g., street signs; store signs; cereal boxes, etc.)	
4. My child can retell a story so that I can understand it. (e.g., retells a story heard at school; retells a story to a brother, sister, or friend)	
5. My child figures out new words he or she sees. (e.g., uses letter sounds and meaning clues to read a store or street sign; perseveres in figuring out unknown words in a story)	
6. When my child reads he or she "guesses" at words, but they usually make sense in the story. (e.g., the story might say "John was racing home" but child reads, "John was running home.")	

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX D

ORAL READING ASSESSMENT

Oral Reading Assessment

Name _____ Teacher _____

Grade _____ Selected by _____

#1 Book Title _____ Date _____

#2 Book Title _____ Date _____

#3 Book Title _____ Date _____

Reading strategies the child uses:	#1	#2	#3
✓ skips unknown word and reads on			
✓ guesses what the word might be			
✓ starts over and reads the whole sentence			
✓ derives meaning from pictures			
✓ uses beginning letter as a clue			
✓ asks for help			
Miscues:			
✓ keeps intended meaning (cat, kitten)			
✓ substitutes phonetically similar words (cat/can)			
✓ skips words			
✓ inserts words			
✓ self-corrects miscues so the text makes sense			
Comprehension:			
✓ reads with expression			
✓ retells the story			
✓ identifies main idea			

Comments:

#1	#2	#3

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APPENDIX E

READING LOG

Name_____

Books I Have Read

Date	Title

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APPENDIX F

READ TO THE PRINCIPAL

READING LOG

Name _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

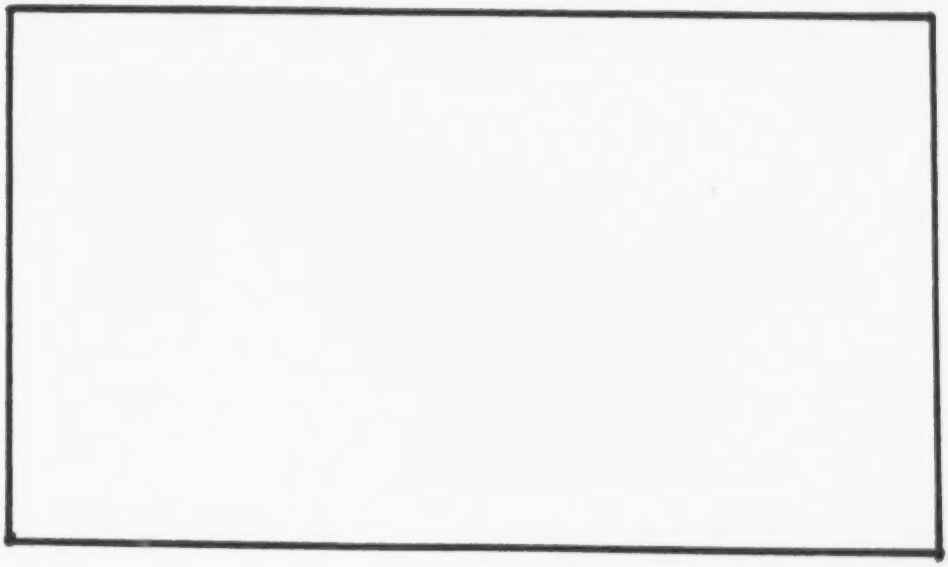
10. _____

Parent's Signature _____

APPENDIX G

STUDENT RESPONSE

This is what I liked about the story.



Name_____

APPENDIX H

STUDENT RESPONSE

_____ is a funny story.
This is a picture of the funniest part of the story.

_____

_____

This is a sentence about my picture.

Name _____